

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1585

INFO AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, PGOV, IV

SUBJ: STUDENT STRIKE AT ABIDJAN UNIVERSITY

BEGIN SUMMARY: STUDENTS AT ABIDJAN UNIVERSITY BEGAN BOYCOTT CLASSES JANUARY 10 IN SUPPORT OF FIVE STUDENTS SUSPENDED AS A RESULT OF MINOR INCIDENTS IN DECEMBER. MINITER OF INTERNAL SECURITY OUASSENAN KONE VISITED CAMPUS JANUARY 11 AND WAS HOOTED DOWN BY DEMONSTRATING STUDENTS. GOIC REACTION HAS BEEN SHARP. THOSE JEERING KONE WERE TAKEN TO NEARBY ARMY CAMP, PRESUMABLY FOR FORCEFUL LECTURING, AND MILITARY FORCES ARE IN PLACE AT UNIVERSITY, THOUGH RELATIVELY UNOBTRUSIVE. ABIDJAN UNIVERSITY SCENE HAS BEEN GENERALLY TRANQUIL SINCE 1971, IN PART BECAUSE STUDENTS ARE WELL TAKEN CARE OF IN TERMS OF STIPENDS, HOUSING AND THE LIKE. INCIDENT REFLECTS UNDERLYING DISCONTENT WITH UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION AND, IN TURN, GOIC RESOLVE TO PREVENT STUDENT UNREST FROM GETTING OUT OF HAND AS HAPPENED IN 1969 AND 1971. END SUMMARY.

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1. DECEMBER INCIDENTS INVOLVED STUDENT REFUSAL TO OBEY INSTRUCTIONS OF YOUNG IVORIAN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR ABOUT SEATING ARRANGEMENTS FOR EXAMINATIONS. TEMPERS FLARED, AND ONE STUDENT CHALLENGED TEACHER TO FISTICUFFS. TWO STUDENTS SUBSEQUENTLY SUSPENDED FOR FIVE YEARS, THREE OTHERS FOR TWO YEARS. STUDENT LEADERS ORGANIZED

BOYCOTT OF CLASSES PROTESTING SEVERITY OF PUNISHMENT.
POLICE AND MILITARY MOVED INTO CAMPUS EVENING JANUARY 10
AND STUDENTS WERE INSTRUCTED TO RETURN TO CLASSES.

2. OUASSENAN KONE'S ADDRESS JANUARY 11 WAS RECEIVED
WITH HOSTILITY, AND STUDENTS PRESENT TAKEN ON TRUCKS TO
MILITARY BASE OUTSIDE ABIDJAN. FLYERS AND PLACARDS HAVE
APPEARED AT THE UNIVERSITY CALLING FOR STUDENT SOLIDARITY,
THE DEPARTURE OF THE MILITARY, AND THE RESIGNATION OF THE
RECTOR AND THE DEAN OF THE FACULTY CONCERNED (ECONOMIC
SCIENCES). THE STRIKE HAS BEEN GENERALLY PEACEFUL, BUT
THERE ARE REPORTS OF OVERTURNED CARS AND ROUGH HANDLING
BY POLICE. A STUDENT DELEGATION CALLED ON PRESIDENT
HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY JANUARY 11 AND WAS REFERRED TO EDUCATION
MINISTER PAUL AKOTO YAO, WITH WHOM NEGOTIATIONS ARE
PRESENTLY UNDERWAY.

3. INCIDENT FLARED WITH SURPRISING SUDDENNESS, AND APPARENT
EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDENT BOYCOTT IN SUPPORT OF SMALL NUMBER
OF UNRULY COLLEAGUES IS UNUSUAL. SOLIDARITY PROBABLY
REFLECTS UNDERLYING DISCONTENT WITH UNIVERSITY ADMINI-
STRATION, WHICH IS REGARDED AS ARBITRARY AND SEVERE.
UNIVERSITY IS BEING GRADUALLY "IVORIANIZED" AND OFFICIALS
EVIDENTLY CONCERNED TO PREVENT DETERIORATION FROM
EUROPEAN (FRENCH) STANDARDS.

4. GHANAIAN AMBASSADOR INFORMED AMBASSADOR OF HIS CON-
CERN OVER GHANAIAN STUDENTS ALLEGEDLY MISTAKEN FOR
IVORIANS AND ROUGHED UP BY POLICE. HE HAS URGED THEM
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TO AVOID CAMPUS UNTIL SITUATION CALMS. MEANWHILE, HE
AND OTHER AFRICAN AMBASSADORS HAVE BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL IN
SEEKING ASSURANCES REGARDING SAFETY OF THEIR STUDENTS,
OR INDEED ANY INFORMATION AT ALL FROM GOIC. THEY HOPE
MAKE JOINT DEMARCHE AT FONOFF THIS AFTERNOON, JANUARY
12. HIS FEELING IS THAT GOIC REACTION TO STUDENT
VIOLENCE MAY BE TOO MILD.

5. COMMENT: DESPITE REACTION OF GHANAIAN AMB, GOIC
SEEMS TO BE TAKING STUDENT DISTURBANCE SERIOUSLY AND
MEASURES TAKEN, IF ACCURATELY REPORTED, APPEAR ANYTHING
BUT MILD. IVORY COAST IN RECENT YEARS HAS BEEN SPARED
STUDENT PROBLEMS COMMON ELSEWHERE IN PART BECAUSE IVORIAN
STUDENTS ARE TREATED GENEROUSLY BY AFRICAN OR ANY OTHER
STANDARDS. STUDENTS ARE PROVIDED WITH APARTMENTS AND
LIVING ALLOWANCES CONSIDERABLY GREATER THAN MOST OF THEM
WILL EARN ON GRADUATION. GOIC WAS BADLY SCARED BY
STUDENT DISTURBANCE IN 1969 AND 71 AND OBVIOUSLY DOES
NOT INTEND TO LET THIS INCIDENT DEVELOP INTO A

REPETITION. THERE HAS BEEN NO MENTION OF IT IN THE PRESS. IT SERVES AS A REMINDER, HOWEVER, THAT THERE IS DISSATISFACTION EVEN IN THE BENIGN ENVIRONMENT OF IVORY COAST, AND THAT WHATEVER ITS COMMITMENT TO DIALOGUE, THE GOIC IS QUITE CAPABLE OF EXERCISING A STRONG HAND AS REGARDS LAW AND ORDER. END COMMENT.

6. IN LATEST DEVELOPMENT, EMBASSY HAS JUST LEARNED THAT UNIVERSITY HAS BEEN CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET IS OUT OF THE COUNTRY (IN TOGO) AND SITUATION UNLIKELY TO BE RESOLVED UNTIL HIS SCHEDULED RETURN ON JANUARY 15.
STEARNS

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Message Attributes

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